



The Ghost of Christmas Present: A Novel

Scott Abbott, Amy Maude Swinton

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It's the fourth Wednesday of November, and Patrick Guthrie is giving thanks. He's giving thanks that his eight-year-old son, Braden, will finally have a procedure on his heart that will cure him of the same life-threatening condition that took Patrick's wife several years earlier. But when Patrick suddenly loses his job teaching drama at a New York City high school, his already desperate financial situation becomes dire. Rebecca Brody, a social worker, shows up at his door with a judge's order for him to appear before the city's family court to determine if Patrick is financially fit, and Patrick realizes he is in danger of losing his son.

Patrick knows that he must somehow make it through the holiday season to a new job waiting for him in the new year. He also knows that Ted Cake, his former father-in-law, blames Patrick so much for the death of his daughter that he, a rich and disagreeable man, is the one pushing the city to call the custody hearing and give the boy over to him. Now Patrick has only three weeks before Christmas to somehow make enough money to pay his bills, present himself to the family court as a fit father, and keep Braden in his life.

It's when Patrick sees a charming beggar on the subway dressed up as a crazy alien that he gets an idea. In true Dickensian holiday spirit, Patrick makes use of his old acting skills and his love of

A Christmas Carol and takes to the streets in the guise of the Ghost of Christmas Present. Making a midtown corner his performing stage, he begins to touch and change the lives of all those who come his way, including Rebecca Brody and the bitter and heartbroken Ted Cake.

The train stopped at a station where the signs read Thirty-fourth Street. The doors opened and Patrick waited for the commuters to disembark before he got off.

He walked to the stairs as the morning light from the street shone and the sounds of Broadway bounced down into the station in echoing waves. He caught sight of himself in the plastic window of the token booth, where the transit workers shook their heads at his appearance.

Perhaps he had gone too far with the costume. Perhaps he had gone too far thinking he should even attempt this madness. Perhaps what was worst of all was thinking he could save the semblance of a life that he could carve for himself with Braden.

Maybe Braden would be better off without him in his daily life. Maybe . . .

Patrick shook off the thought as the noise of Broadway waited for him above. He drew in a breath and exhaled. "Into the breach, dear friends."

He began to climb the stairs.

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